

Matthew 28:5-6

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

The saying, ‘Don’t believe everything you read in the papers’

- Is such a common criticism of the modern British press
- That it has probably become a cliché

It was 20 years ago that *The Sun* published one of the most famous headlines ever

- ‘Freddie Starr ate my hamster’
- an allegation that Freddie Starr has consistently denied
- this week, the *New Musical Express* carried an article picked up by the *Daily Mail*
- ‘The Day I snorted my father’s ashes’ by Keith Richards
- on Radio Five Live a music journalist was asked if he thought the story were true
- rather evasively he replied, ‘It was probably true at the time’

Although we often associate ‘propaganda’ with the Nazi era, it is still with us today

- propaganda relies on using information in a misleading and often illogical way
- it is intentionally vague, it oversimplifies and uses simple slogans

On the other hand history is the study of past events and activities

- historians try to answer historical questions through careful research
- through what is written, what is said and what is physically preserved

When we come to the resurrection narratives (e.g. Matthew 28), we must ask some questions

- Is this sensational journalism of the ‘Freddie Starr ate my hamster’ kind?
- Is it something that was true at the time of the ‘Keith Richards father’s ashes’ kind?
- Is it propaganda, attempting to use information in a misleading and illogical way?
- Is it history – or some other kind of writing? What kind of writing is it?

Each of the four canonical gospels concludes with resurrection stories

- Although there are some variations in the accounts
- With each gospel writer bringing something unique to the resurrection tradition
- Three elements are common to all four gospels
- The empty tomb
- The announcement of the resurrection to the women
- the appearances of the risen Lord to the disciples

Christians have traditionally believed that the Bible is the Word of God

- That Jesus was God incarnate, the supreme revelation of God
- That the Gospels are true and form a written revelation of Jesus Christ
- And that God speaks by these today giving them authority in the life of a believer

As far as the Christian faith is concerned, the Apostle Paul goes as far as to say

- That if Christ has not been raised from the dead, the Christian faith is vain
- Paul’s great hope was that through Christ the believer had forgiveness and life
- If Christ has not been raised, we cannot be raised and we are still in our sins

I A TRUTH REVEALED

Matthew's gospel extends for 28 chapters – and though these are not of equal length

- We can gain an impression of the balance of the gospel by reviewing these
- The first two chapters record the circumstances of the birth of Jesus Christ
- And then no more is said until Jesus is about to begin his public ministry in Galilee
- The next 18 chapters describe a unique ministry, a unique life and a unique person
- And bring us to the last week of Jesus' life with the Palm Sunday story (Chapter 21)
- the pace then slows for seven long chapters to walk with Jesus
- through Holy Week, including his betrayal, trial, crucifixion and burial
- as Jesus progresses to his death on the cross more and more detail is given
- then in one brief chapter, twenty short verses declare: Jesus is alive!

Matthew begins the account of this resurrection day at dawn

- recounting how certain women came to the tomb, 'after the sabbath'
- having been placed in the tomb before sunset on Friday (Day One)
- Jesus remained in the tomb on the Saturday (Day Two)
- And on the third day was raised to life again

The first visitors to the tomb on this Sunday morning were the women

- Who had faithfully stayed with Jesus until the end and witnessed his crucifixion
- And who, with Joseph of Arimathea, had shared in burial of Jesus' body
- On the Sunday morning the women went to the tomb
- Matthew alone records that the angel of the Lord rolled away the stone and sat on it
- His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow
- The guards, not known for their timidity, shook and became like dead men
- But the stone was removed not to let the risen Christ out but to let the women look in

If they wanted to find Jesus, the women (even in the greatest sincerity)

- Were on the wrong track – but they were very soon redirected by God's messenger
- An absolutely critical question is what kind of saying is this – how are we to take it?
- Is it the kind of saying that a tabloid newspaper would use as a headline
- Is something of which one could evasively say, 'It was probably true at the time'
- Is it simply a propaganda device of the gospels, misleading, illogical, manipulative
- Or do the words of the angel constitute a divine revelation?

Whereas experience can prepare us for a great many things – nothing could prepare for this

- Up until the previous Friday the women would have hoped Jesus was the Messiah
- From his death all hope seemed lost – he was only 'the one who was crucified'
- The women come to the tomb simply seeking the one who was crucified
- But he is not there – as proof, the angel invites them to see the place where he lay
- This is not a case of spiritual resurrection or persistence of personality
- The body is not there because he is alive – he is risen indeed
- While other stories will be concocted to try to cover up the truth
- God's word of revelation through the angel tells the real story
- Jesus has been raised from the dead

II A TRUTH PROCLAIMED

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

(Matthew 28:5-8)

It is difficult to know whether the women have been frightened by the earthquake

- By the angel or by the stone having been rolled away from the tomb
- Probably a combination of all these factors – as often with angelic appearances
- The angel’s first words are ‘do not be afraid’
- The empty tomb itself was capable of several explanations
- Not least that Jesus’ body had been removed and laid elsewhere
- But the word of revelation from the angel gives the true explanation
- Although Matthew does not mention the folded grave clothes (Luke)
- The folded grave clothes would identify exactly the place where the body lay

It is interesting that women are chosen to be special witnesses of the cross and resurrection

- There was some disagreement among Jews about the validity of a woman’s testimony
- And the idea that the men were hiding away while the women visit the tomb
- Make it most unlikely that this story would be made up
- Women, listed by name, stood at the foot of the cross
- Women went with Joseph of Arimathea to bear the body of Jesus to the burial place
- Women witnessed the sealing of the tomb
- Women are witnesses to the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus

The great issue at his Jewish trial and at his Roman trial had been Jesus’ true identity

- At his Jewish trial the issue was whether he was the Christ, the Son of God
- At his Roman trial the issue was whether he was the King of the Jews
- The religious leaders wanted him killed because he claimed to be the Christ
- The Roman authorities, on Pilate’s orders, put ‘the King of the Jews’ on his cross
- The resurrection of Jesus was an astonishing verification of his true identity

As Paul wrote to the Romans:

Through the Spirit of holiness (he) was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 1:4)

The women followers of Jesus are told to go quickly and tell the disciples

- That he is risen from the dead and is going ahead into Galilee where they will see him
- The whole thing must have been almost too much for the women to take in
- ‘afraid, yet filled with joy, (they) ran to tell his disciples
- but before they reached them something even more dramatic took place

III A TRUTH EXPERIENCED

As the women are hurrying to meet the disciples

- suddenly, Jesus appeared to them
- his word of greeting which they had probably heard on so many occasions
- now turns their fear into worship – and they clasped his feet
- the mention that they clasped his feet emphasises that this is no ghostly apparition
- but that Jesus was truly risen and alive

In the Bible angels never allow themselves to be worshipped (Rev. 22:8-9)

- nor do apostles (Acts 10:25 – 26; 14:11 – 15)
- the fact that Jesus allows this worship is an acknowledgment of his true identity
- but we should notice that the historicity of Jesus' resurrection
- is not based only on gullible enthusiasm – but on the facts
- first, they had seen him crucified, dead and buried
- then they had seen the angel, heard God's word through him and see the empty tomb
- convinced by the facts and obedient to the word they were journeying to tell others
- when Jesus appeared to them and they worshipped him

We began by identifying A TRUTH REVEALED

And continued by recounting A TRUTH PROCLAIMED

Then for the women, meeting the risen Lord, we have A TRUTH EXPERIENCED

But it seems to me that there would have been no likelihood of the experience

- without first the revelation and the proclamation
- but today the resurrection is not something to confined to the past
- although there is the past and we can affirm Christ rose
- there is also the present 'Christ is risen'
- and the promise – that by faith we can know him today

The women responded to each unfolding piece of evidence

- they followed him to the cross and attended to his body after his death
- they encountered the revelation of truth
- and obeyed what had been proclaimed to them
- and when they had the experience of meeting Jesus – they worshipped him

The great challenge of the gospel is that if we stay fixed on the revelation of the empty tomb

- and are ready to respond to the proclamation of God's word
- that we will in our own way experience the risen Christ and worship him
- although this is about Christian experience – it is not airy-fairy experience
- Christianity is a historically based faith
- In which we find the credible evidence that God has entered history
- In the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour

The Apostle Paul focused on the resurrection of Jesus as the vindication of his identity

- Paul was looking for life and forgiveness – if Christ was not raised
- Faith was futile – no one else would be raised and we are still in our sins

Whatever can be said about the teachings of Jesus between the crucifixion and resurrection

- it must have seemed to the disciples as if things had come to a tragic close
- only the resurrection could transform that
- and only the empty tomb is the historic basis for the resurrection
- in fact the empty tomb and the resurrection put a new perspective on life

The TRUTH REVEALED, the TRUTH PROCLAIMED and the TRUTH EXPERIENCED

- can give us what might be called the resurrection perspective on life
- for the modern-day Christian, this is earthed in the word of God
- the proclamation of Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended and coming again
- and in the heart experience of the believer, who by faith, knows the risen Saviour
- Matthew teaches us that it is vitally important to maintain this resurrection perspective

We must not play off heart experience and Biblical preaching and teaching against each other

- The contention that people can be of heart and not of head
- Will not do any more than the contention that people can be of head and not of heart
- Matthew's gospel gives us five great blocks of teaching from the Lord Jesus
- To develop disciples committed to the life and mission of his kingdom
- Working in the world as salt and light, being in the community as his servants
- Expecting and looking for the glory of his eternal kingdom

The task of the disciples in the great commission was to teach (disciple) other disciples

- A problem with today's church is that we have so many 'undisciplined disciples'
- We must not set experience against teaching or teaching against experience
- We do not want arid lifeless preaching and teaching
- Any more than we want thoughtless, untaught living
- Instead we need people with the resurrection perspective on life
- Committed to revelation, proclamation and experience of the risen Christ

With the resurrection perspective everything is changed

- Our work and use of time takes on an eternal perspective
- Out of keeping with the Jesus-affects-my-Sundays-but-not-my-Mondays approach
- But let's remember the would-be disciple who could not follow because of his oxen
- Our use of our homes, our property, our finances takes on an eternal perspective
- Out of keeping with the Jesus-affects-my-pennies-but-not-my-pounds approach
- But let's remember the would-be disciple who could not follow because of his field
- Our relationships take on an eternal perspective
- Our of keeping with the Jesus-affects-me-but-not-my-family approach
- But let's remember the would-be disciple who could not follow because of a new wife
- Maybe he would not have been a would-be disciple if his wife had followed too

The empty tomb and the resurrection also put our sorrow into perspective

- Because Jesus lives we can face tomorrow and plan for an eternity with him
- We will then be able to accomplish anything to which he calls us
- To control our temper, overcome addictions, remain faithful to commitments
- Maintain patience under provocation – in the knowledge, love is stronger than death
- He is risen: A truth revealed, a truth proclaimed, a truth experienced